PRINCESS ELISABETH ANTARCTICA: EMBRACING CHANGE



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The long and difficult chapter concerning the dispute over the management and operation of Princess Elisabeth Station research station has come to a close, or one might say, has turned a page. Zuhal Demir, Belgian Federal Secretary of State for Science Policy and Alain Hubert, Founder and President of the International Polar Foundation (IPF), shook hands on a new agreement to reset PEA on a positive course for collaborative international scientific research on the icy continent.

Background

The International Polar Foundation and its private partners conceived of and built the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica research station in the Dronning Maud Land region of East Antarctica. Princess Elisabeth is the first polar research station designed to run entirely on renewable energy sources (wind and solar power). Construction was completed in February 2009, and in March 2010 the International Polar Foundation donated the station to the Belgian State under specific conditions. Among these was that a public-private partnership (Belgian Polar Secretariat) be set up to manage the station, and that in light of the technical specificities of the PEA Station the International Polar Foundation be allowed to continue to manage the station operations and logistical support for research activities. However, since the donation, there had been a simmering conflict between the two parties over interpretation of the agreement and this has had a detrimental impact on the Foundation as well as scientific activities.

A New Partnership

When Minister Zuhal Demir came to power earlier this year, she quickly saw the need for reconciliation and a new partnership between the Belgian State and International Polar Foundation so that the important scientific work carried out at the PE station could re-launch with added vigour. This young Secretary of State was able to break the dead-lock where many others had failed to the detriment to the future of Princess Elisabeth Antarctica and the international reputation of Belgium. A new and constructive solution was found that would resolve the conflict.

“We have pressed the "reset" button so we can start on a blank page. Good agreements and good discussions make good friends. I do not look to the past, but to the future, and the future is scientific research.” Zuhal Demir, Belgian Secretary of State for Science Policy

2017-2018 Scientific Expedition

Thanks to the openness of Secretary Demir, and the tenacity of Alain Hubert and the International Polar Foundation, this re-established partnership once again places Belgium at the forefront of science in Antarctica. The upcoming season will be an exciting one, with fifteen scientific research projects planned and twenty-five scientists from a dozen countries.

So stay tuned for more news about the scientists and their research during the 2017-2018 expedition to Princess Elisabeth Antarctica!